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ABSTRACT

This paper recounts the story of Elsie Ripley Clapp (1879-1964), an associate of John Dewey and well known in progressive education circles, who became extensively involved in rural education in Kentucky and West Virginia. The first part of the paper gives an overview of Clapp's early life in the New York City area, her educational background, her teaching experiences, and her acceptance of the position of principal of the George Rogers Clark Ballard Memorial School in Jefferson, Kentucky. Pointing out that Clapp's work at Ballard and later at Arthurdale (West Virginia) were clear attempts to implement progressive pedagogy in more rural settings and in a more public arena, the paper then considers her intellectual growth while at Columbia University and her authorship of articles that provide insight into her ideas about progressive education and the goal of understanding the interaction of the school and the community. The paper describes her work at the Ballard School from 1929 to 1934. It then discusses her work from 1934 to 1936 at the Arthurdale school that was developed as part of President Franklin Roosevelt's National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933 which set up the first federal subsistence program. The paper notes that "this wonderful social and educational experiment in community planning lasted only two years." Elsie Ripley Clapp's linking of school and community with self realization and democracy shows that there is a need for serious dialogue on the purpose of education in U.S. society. Includes 85 notes. (BT)

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Symposium

Founding Mothers:

Women Founders of Progressive Schools and Feminist Theories of Leadership

Elsie Ripley Clapp and the Arthurdale Schools

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Elsie Ripley Clapp and the Arthurdale Schools

Introduction

> "A community school foregoes its separateness. It is influential because it belongs to its people. They share its ideals and its work. It takes from them and gives to them. There are no bounds as far as I can see to what it could accomplish in social reconstruction if it had enough wisdom and insight and devotion and energy. It demands all these for changes in living and learning of people are not produced by imparting information about different conditions or by gathering statistical data about what exists, but by creating with people, for people."[1]

Written in Kentucky during the darkest days of the depression, Elsie Ripley Clapp described her pedagogy and her democratic conception of the community school. Deeply influenced by her association with and reading of John Dewey, Clapp believed the depression only worsened the loss of community in American society and that the school could serve as a means to restore community life. In our own era, where discussion of community abounds, Clapp's work in progressive education provides insight in linking the school and community in preparing children for active participation in a democratic society. Her work presents a challenge to those who see education as merely the imparting of information and learning defined as a point in time, easily assessed by pencil and paper tests. Learning for Clapp is both an individual and a social process, grounded in human experience.

By 1934, when Elsie Clapp had begun her work at Arthurdale, she was well known in progressive education circles. From 1933 to 1934 she chaired the National Committee on Rural Education for the Progressive Education Association {PEA}, was vice-president of the PEA from

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[1] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "A Rural School in Kentucky," **Progressive Education** 10 (March 1933): 128.

1933 through 1934, and served as a member of the PEA advisory and executive board from 1924 to 1936.[2]

Although Clapp's experience in rural education was limited to Kentucky, she would soon be extensively involved in rural education in West Virginia, truly learning by doing. Her experiences in rural education are documented in two books, *Community Schools in Action* written in 1939 and *The Use of Resources in Education* published in 1952 and also in several articles.[3]

Early Life and Education

Clapp's intellectual maturity and her attempt to integrate theory and practice developed over a number of years from personal experience and extensive experience in public and private education. Born in 1879 in Brooklyn, New York, Clapp spent her early years in Brooklyn Heights, and described the first fourteen years of her life "as incredibly comfortable, protected, in our own world...We lived unostentatiously perhaps, but luxuriously."[4] Later in life Clapp recalled this elitist lifestyle as highly restricted, never impromptu. Clapp's real education occurred in the

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[2] United States Department of Interior Application to Arthurdale, Employment and Biographical Data. Elsie Ripley Clapp Papers, (hereafter designated ERCP), 1910-1943 Series 1, Collection 21, Special Collections- Morris Library, Southern Illinois University. Collection 38 contains photographs from a scrapbook Clapp maintained.

[3] Elsie Ripley Clapp, **Community Schools in Action** (New York: Viking, 1939) and **The Use of Resources in Education** (New York: Harper and Row, 1952).

[4] **Elsie Ripley Clapp Memoirs: 1879-1964.** [hereafter ERCM], 54. These are in the possession of Ms. Barbara Raun, Elsie Ripley Clapp's niece. The memoirs are autobiographical and end when Clapp began the Ballard work in 1929. The last twenty years of her life are difficult to chronicle. This may have been due to failing health.

home. "The real education I received in childhood came through familiarity with the libraries of my father and grandfather and association with the older members of my family and exposure to their interests."[5] This education also included concerts, theater, and dancing. Educated in local private schools, Clapp attended high school from 1894 through 1899 at the Packer Collegiate Institute in Brooklyn.[6] Packer challenged Clapp intellectually and socially, giving her some interaction with girls from other social classes and ethnic groups. Much of her energy in high school was spent improving her Latin skills, reading and translating. Following high school graduation she enrolled at Vassar, however she expressed disappointment her first year because the courses were less rigorous than those at the Packer Institute. "Classes may be dull, but at least I have this library."[7]

Unfortunately, during her sophomore year, Clapp was diagnosed with chronic appendicitis and later phlebitis. These conditions resulted in her leaving Vassar, eventually transferring her credits to Barnard College where she matriculated in 1908 with a degree in English. Prior to completing her degree at Barnard, Clapp accepted a teaching position at the Brooklyn Heights Seminary teaching 7th and 8th grade English from 1903 to 1907.[8] For five months during the 1908 to 1909 school year she taught at the Horace Mann School at Teachers College in New York.

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[5] ERCM, 46.

[6] There is a discrepancy in the Clapp papers regarding the actual date of her birth. The most consistent date is 1879.

[7] ERCM, 70.

[8] For a brief biographical sketch of Clapp see Barry Westfall, "Elsie Ripley Clapp and the Arthurdale School: 1934-1936," **Vitae Scholasticae** (Spring 1993): 53-64.

Here she tutored 5th, 6th and 7th grade children who needed remedial work.[9] While pursuing the Bachelor of Arts, Clapp also took graduate classes in the philosophy department at Columbia University and Teachers College. She studied the history of philosophy with William Montague, fundamental problems of philosophy and Aristotle with F.J.E. Woodbridge, Plato with Wendell Bush, Kant with Arthur Lovejoy and courses in ethics and curriculum with John Dewey. The association with Teachers College brought her into contact with William H. Kilpatrick, whom Clapp described as a lifelong friend. Following graduation from Barnard, she enrolled in graduate study at Columbia University where she received a masters degree in philosophy in 1909.

During 1909-1910 Clapp spent most of her efforts in the English Department, although her heart seemed drawn to philosophy. She studied with Dewey, taking in a course on Kant, "a course notable for its clarity and conciseness," and also took Dewey's course in the *Philosophy of Education* at Teachers College. Known by members of the philosophy department, Clapp gradually became one of Dewey's most admiring students. She explained: "One day Dr. Dewey appeared in the Philosophy room with his hands full of papers. Could I, he asked, find time to help him with these? I could and did. Many students were I found failing because they were confused."[10] Clapp suggested Dewey conference with the students and possibly cut down on lecturing. Apparently, Dewey complied to the success of his students. During the summer of 1910 Clapp assisted Dewey in his course *Aims and Principles of Education* at Teachers College; an assistantship Clapp believed Dewey paid for out of his own salary.

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[9] Clapp remained in this position for five months, but due to its interference with classes left to work as secretary for the **Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods** sponsored by the philosophy department at Columbia University. Woodbridge served as editor of the journal at this time. She received a stipend of $50.00 per month.

[10] ERCM, 105

Clapp continued her studies in English and in philosophy noting attendance at Dewey's revolutionary lectures on *Types of Logical Theory*. However, Clapp recalls, "Dewey received no support in this endeavor. Montague was a realist, Woodbridge called himself a metaphysical realist, and Dr. Bush was a Platonist..." To them, the distinctions against Dewey inveighed were necessary and inevitable. Although his ideas apparently fascinated them, for members of the Department attended most of his course. They found it difficult to grasp his conception of the individual-in-the -world, acting upon it and reacting to it, living and learning."[11] Clapp is attempting to address Dewey's concept of experience. Although Clapp took graduate courses in English, "it was in philosophy and in philosophy of education that I experienced stimulation and satisfaction. Continuing study with Dewey, she took two courses, *The Logic of Experience* and *Philosophy and Education in their Historic Relations.* In taking these courses, Clapp "discovered what it is really to know a writer, and realized that the insight that discerns significant relation between education's development and the history of thought is the result of both reflection and wide knowledge and experience."[12] In the summer of 1911 Clapp assisted Dewey in preparing for two courses, *An Analysis of Experience* and *Theory of Experience*. Clapp appreciated and admired Dewey's patience and "willingness to receive ideas offered by his young assistant and by his generosity in finding in them matter relevant to his own thinking."[13]

Clapp completed all the course work for a doctorate in English, but never completed the dissertation. Describing her study in the English department, Clapp recalled "no one guided a

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[11] ERCM, 109. This gives some insight into how pragmatism was not intellectually accepted in American philosphy departments.

[12] Ibid., 111. At this time she was receiving aid through the Curtis Scholarship in English, $50.00 from the Journal and a summer assistantship of $75.00 from Dewey.

[13] Ibid., 114.

graduate student's choice of courses; I now cannot recall my reasons for my selection but, generally speaking I chose courses which I had not already had in high school and college...I worked hard in these years and was happing feeling that at long last I was getting some solid work done and was succeeding in it. I have often said that while I was at the University no one ever praised me; that was true." Clapp's thesis was to examine the theory of English grammar in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, a foreboding task. However, during the preliminaries, what today might be called a qualifying exam, several of the English faculty members began to argue among themselves and after an hour Clapp left the examination in disgust. "I felt outraged for I knew I had been baited-a fact which Trent did not deny, but also that I had allowed myself to be routed, and of this I was ashamed. My only comfort was a note from Dr. Dewey to whom I had communicated the bare facts."[14] In a note to Clapp, Dewey claimed to be stunned. "I thought I knew University life, but find I have it still to learn. The whole situation eludes me completely so that I cannot react in any intelligent way, so far as advice is concerned...All I can make of it is that they thought you needed a little discipline and that requiring a second examination would give it to you."[15] Clapp described her relations with the English Department as formal, casual and impersonal and refused to undergo a second examination.

In the spring of 1912, after leaving Columbia University, Clapp began work as a member of the Committee on Children in the Patterson Silk Workers' Strike Organization. As a member of the committee Clapp was charged with visiting the homes of workers taking care of the striker's children. This job opened Clapp's eyes to a different world from Brooklyn Heights. She "became

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[14] ERCM, 131-132.

[15] Ibid., 132.

well acquainted with the Lower East Side and the uptown tenement districts. I was amazed to discover how poor and crowded were the homes of those who had offered refuge to the children of their fellow workers."[16] An eye opening experience to poverty and class conflict, Clapp would meet Bill and Margaret Sanger, Bill Hayward of the Industrial Workers of the World, Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, William Zorach, Carla Tresca, Arturo Giovanniti and John Reed. Clapp seemed mostly an observer and was particularly surprised and impressed with the workers' ability to work cooperatively in a common cause. Clapp learned a great deal from her observations and participation, if nothing else a growing sympathy with the plight of the working class.

In 1913 Clapp traveled south to Charleston, South Carolina to teach in an exclusive girls school, Ashley Hall where she headed the English department from 1913 to 1914. [17] While teaching at Ashley Hall and showing a growing political maturation, Clapp and 22,000 women participated in a suffrage parade in Washington during President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration. Although police were everywhere, they ignored the "hoodlums who surged out from the sidewalk and forced us to reduce the marching lines to eight abreast. But not a single woman faltered and finally we reached the Auditorium at the top of Capital Avenue."[18]

Clapp left Ashley Hall in 1914, and taught English for one year at Jersey City High School. In 1915 she returned to teach at the Brooklyn Heights Seminary where she remained from

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[16] ERCM, 137.

[17] While in Charleston, Clapp spent time exploring the city and even sought out the Socialist Local. ERCM, 150.

[18] ERCM, 162.

1915 to 1921 and served as head of the English Department and as executive secretary to the principal.[19]

During the summer of 1921 Clapp once again entered Dewey's life, asking him if she could help him in his summer courses at Teachers College. Clapp's experiences now gave her insight into philosophy of education, claiming "the practical work I had been doing for the past six years seemed to have deepened by understanding of philosophy of education."[20] Leaving Brooklyn Heights in 1921, Clapp moved to Milton, Massachusetts to teach English and history at the Milton Academy for Girls where she also headed the English Department from 1922 to 1923. Milton was a pleasant experience for Clapp, "even I was the only progressive at the school, other staff members cooperated readily with me."[21]

From 1923 to 1924 Clapp taught 7th grade at the City and Country School in New York. Begun by Caroline Pratt in 1914, the City and Country School served as an experimental institution in the middle of Greenwich Village. The school attracted artists and writers, many who were willing to place their children in an innovative educational program.[22] Close colleagues of

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[19] In 1916, once again in her life Clapp began to experience health problems, this time diagnosed with a cataract. In 1917, feeling a need to make a contribution to the war effort, Clapp took a job with the Red Cross Canteen which had charge of all soldiers and sailors passing through the city on their way to and from Europe.

[20] ECRM, 189.

[21] Ibid., 193. Clapp spent the summer of 1922 assisting Dewey in a course entitled *Special Problems in the Philosophy of Education* and painting with William Zorach.

[22] See Lawrence Cremin, **The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957** (New York: Vintage, 1964), 204-205. The City and Country School is also discussed in John Dewey and Evelyn Dewey's "Schools of Tomorrow," in **The Middle Works 1899-1924.** Volume 8, 1915. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1979), 285-290. For recent discussion of the City and Country School see Susan Semel's *The City and Country School: A Progressive Paradigm* in Semel and Sadlovik's **Schools of Tomorrow, Schools of Today** (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 121-140.

Clapp, Elizabeth Stanton and Lucy Sprague Mitchell were also associated with the City and Country School, and remained close to Clapp throughout her educational career. While teaching at the City and Country School, Clapp helped Dewey during the 1923-1924 winter sessions at Teachers College. Clapp felt like an outsider at the City and Country School and found the teachers' attitude of discipleship toward Caroline Pratt distasteful. She also believed Pratt was jealous of her extensive education and her association with Dewey.[23]

Leaving the City and Country School, Clapp served from 1924 to 1929 as principal of the Rosemary Junior School in Greenwich, Connecticut. Clapp described the early years at Rosemary much like rolling a ball uphill. "The children, accustomed to maids and chauffeurs and to a weak and inefficient school, were both bad mannered and indolent and lacking any work habits or interests...some parents were hopeful, more doubtful and a few hostile."[24] Gradually, the children became more alive and interested in their work. Clapp commented that the teachers in the secondary school [called the upper school at Rosemary] were "astonished to find that in progressive schools, such as ours, teachers occupied a far more responsible and independent position..."[25] Clapp implied from her experiences at the Rosemary Junior School that a highly selected and trained staff was necessary for a progressive school to work; a belief she carried and applied at the Ballard School in Kentucky and at Arthurdale, West Virginia. Student teachers from Vassar were baptized in progressive pedagogy under Clapp's direction and one, Elisabeth Sheffield would follow her to Ballard and Arthurdale. Although successful at the Rosemary Junior

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[23] During her short stay at the City and Country School, Clapp became friends with Jessie Stanton and Harriet Johnson who would assist her at Arthurdale, largely offering expertise in early childhood education.

[24] ERCM, 228-229.

[25] Ibid., 242.

School, Clapp wished to apply her progressive pedagogy in a larger community setting, gaining a better understanding of the role of the school in the community. At this time, the "progressive Education Association continually sought ways and means of introducing progressive methods into the public schools in which the majority of the children in our country are educated-a task rendered difficult by the size of their class groups, and especially the fact that most public school teachers then were untrained in progressive ways of thinking."[26]

Such an opportunity came when Clapp was offered the position as principal of the George Rogers Clark Ballard Memorial School in Jefferson, Kentucky. She also lectured at the University of Louisville. Clapp remained at Ballard until 1934 when she accepted a position at Arthurdale, the first federal subsistence homestead project of the New Deal, located near Reedsville, West Virginia. The work at Ballard and Arthurdale are clear attempts to implement progressive pedagogy in more rural settings and in a more public arena.

Clapp's Intellectual Growth

Clapp is best known for her work at Ballard and Arthurdale, however her intellectual growth at Columbia and earlier written articles provide insight into her ideas about progressive education and the goal of understanding the interaction of the school and the community.

Clapp considered herself a clear disciple of John Dewey and recalled her first experience in reading Dewey's *School and Society* as a sophomore at Vassar. "I still remember the night I first read it as a sophomore at Vassar. We were all excited by it and barely believed that such an

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[26] ERCM, 271. Clapp is conveying a concern among progressive educators that their success was limited largely to the private sector and lab schools. Dewey was also aware of this limitation and pushed Clapp to explore this option.

education was in existence."[27] Clapp's understanding of Dewey's philosophy and pedagogy was enhanced by her close work with him as a student and as his teaching assistant. Dewey expressed confidence in Clapp's philosophical insight and before teaching one course asked, "I should appreciate it if you would make any further suggestions that have occurred to you-reflections before I actually start teaching one course. I regret to say the educational course is in about the same dim and inchoate form [word illegible] that is was."[28] In soliciting Clapp's input from another course, Dewey responded to Clapp's comments.

"While things have not all come together in my mind yet, I got more help that day in what I had been trying to do and got stuck in...connecting the chief issues of philosophy...with natural perplexities of life that I can tell you. And I have found much enlightenment in what you have not sent me. So great is my indebtedness, that it makes me apprehensive, not I hope..but that such a generous exploitation of your ideas as is likely to result if and when I publish the outcome...I want to hold you to your word about future conversation."[29]

Clapp and Dewey held a mutual respect for each other, a professional respect in which they never referred to each other as Elsie or John.[30] One of their interesting correspondences focused on the meaning of experience, a concept central to Dewey's pragmatism and Clapp's pedagogy. In her notes as a teaching assistant Clapp attempted to clarify the meaning of

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[27] ERCP, Fragment concerning the Dewey Lab School, p. 1. Series 2. This fragment also contains Clapp's disgust on the demise of the lab school. "Its end was precipitated by the President of the University who, anxious of the unprecedented acclaim of the school received, contrived a merger with the Cook County Normal School, an outgrowth of the Chicago Institute headed by Colonel Parker."See Robert Westbrook, **John Dewey and American Democracy** (New York: Cornell University, 1991), 111-113 for more detailed discussion of the Dewey Lab School and the politics surrounding the school.

[28] ERCP, John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp, September 18, 1911. Series 1.

[29] ERCP, John Dewey to Elsie Ripley Clapp, September 2, 1911 Notes concerning discussion of knowledge and desire,. Series 1.

[30] Interview, Fletcher Collins, Summer 1997. Collins was head of the Music and Drama at Arthurdale from 1934-1936 and a personal friend of Elsie Clapp.

experience. "Do not call it experience unless the modification of conscious action. Education is a social process whereby the individual is assisted by others having foresight of consequences. All known experience is social in character and can be explained as an interaction of biological and social factors."[31] Building upon her discussion with Dewey about the nature of desire, Clapp notes that, "Education is any modification of the one who has the experience with a view to receiving more desirable; avoiding less desirable forms of further experience."[32] Clapp will eventually attempt to capture this desire, what Dewey will later refer to as interest as a basis for developing curriculum, in the interest of the child and the community.[33]

In this early association between teacher and teaching assistant, Dewey began to articulate concepts such as experience, certainty, contingency and the role of philosophy which will later be expressed through books such as *Experience and Nature, A Quest for Certainty, Experience and Education, Reconstruction in Philosophy*, and *Democracy and Education*. Through Clapp's notes on Dewey's lectures, it is easy to understand her belief that philosophy is more that the idealist search for truth and wisdom, it is a means to transform the environment to meet the needs of the individual and community. Clapp and Dewey began to see community life composed of art, thinking, inference, shared experience, inquiry and free and undistorted communication.[34] Both viewed these as characteristics of democratic society. While chaos, disorder, confusion and

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[31] ERCP, Notes regarding theories of experience. Ca. 1911, p. 3. Series 2.

[32] Ibid, 2.

[33] See ERCP, Report of Dewey's lecture on desire, October 31, 1911. Series 2.

[34] For more extensive discussion of these topics see ERCP, Typed copy of Dewey's "Environment and Organism" ordinally published in Cyclopedia of Education in 1913. Also see ERCP, John Dewey's syllabus for the course, Types of Philosophic Thought, Columbia University, 1922/1923. Series 2.

conflict were a part of human social interaction, within the context of democratic society there is the freedom to interact and create conditions for accelerated social change.[35]

To gain a further understanding of Elsie Clapp and her pedagogy it is necessary to visit her published works in which she often describes her educational experiments. Clapp wrote one of her first articles while serving as principal of the Rosemary Junior School in Greenwich, Connecticut. The article, *Subject Matters in Experimental Education*, published in ***Progressive Education*** was based on her experience at Rosemary, "one of the oldest and largest of the conservative college preparatory schools in the east."[36] Influenced by Dewey, Clapp explains that, "Professor Dewey suggests that the activity of a person in remaking for his own purpose, his environment is comparable to the practice of the artist in reshaping, recreating his world. For he refashions it to the end that it and he can function reciprocally, and with the result that they are in a developing and harmonious interrelation. And so he is organically, himself integrated in the process."[37] Clapp strongly suggests in the article that subject matter be chosen on the basis of inquiry, experience and the interest of the child. It was important to listen the voices of the children. Clapp also believed teachers should be masters of their subject matter to give children more than just a superficial understanding.[38] For Clapp, teachers were to be active participants in community life, identifying with the life and interest of the community. "The teachers were residents, neighbors.

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[35] ERCP, Chapter notes outlining the Dewey course, "Philosophy of Education in Their Historic Relations," October 4, 1910-May 18, 1911. Series 1.

[36] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Subject Matters in Experimental Education," **Progressive Education** 3 (Oct., Nov., and December, 1926): 370.

[37] Ibid., 373.

[38] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "In How Far Shall the Curriculum Be Based on Children's Interest and in How Far on Teachers' Judgement," **Progressive Education** 7 (May 1930): 181-182.

Their life is part of the community. Their comings and goings are part of the happenings. They work of the school with the children-health matters, social matters-takes them everywhere, into homes in contact with people of every kind."[39] She also added a sobering note to anyone aspiring to teach in this type of setting. "There is no ease, little leisure, much work, great happiness, no aloofness, take and give, learning and living-expanding work and answering growing needs."[40] Teacher were to be active in community and experts in their subject matter.

Clapp continued her concerns about traditional subject matter and the approach to it in another article entitled, *Children's Mathematics* written in 1928. Clapp believed that math, taught in the traditional manner of facts to be learned turned children off from understanding its value. She suggested teachers needed to be integrating material such as

> "...looking into how men long ago counted and measured, when they figured and measured, how they recorded it, how this helped them in their living, how it helped them to get food, to build, to exchange goods, to travel, to provide, to export and import, to think out problems without having to go thought physically what they wanted to do, to foresee to try other ways to get the facts they needed, to check results, to invent, to improve conditions, to plan new things, to discover lands, to analyze, to draw conclusions."[41]

Clapp saw no reason why language, art, music, and history could not be integrated into helping children better understand math, emphasizing the important role of process in learning, the freedom to make sense of information (math in this case) and its relationship to other knowledge or subject matter. For Clapp, subject matter is accumulated human experience, thus all knowledge is connected and children may experience difficulty when knowledge becomes

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[39] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Children's Mathematics," **Progressive Education** 5 (April, May, June, 1928): 132.

[40] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "The Teacher in Social Education," **Progressive Education** 10 (May, 1933): 287.

[41] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Children's' Mathematics," 132.

bracketed into subject matter categories, separate from human experience. Clapp's interest in literature and art helped broaden her knowledge in experimenting with subject matter. Literature, art, music and dance were integral parts of the Ballard and Arthurdale work. Both schools gave Clapp the opportunity to test her ideas in pedagogy, integrating theory and practice.

The Ballard School 1929-1934

The Ballard School was a rural public school in Jefferson, Kentucky and under the control of the Jefferson County Board of Education. Land for the school was donated by Mrs. Thurston Ballard in memory of her son George Rogers Clark Ballard. The Ballard School comprised several consolidated one and two room schools in the county and in 1932 enrolled 212 students. During Clapp's tenure, the school consisted of ten grades, eight elementary and two secondary. Seventy five percent of the children came from poor rural areas with approximately twenty five percent from more well-to-do farm families.[42]

Clapp described the children as "backward in reading, they did not seem to comprehend what they were studying, and exhibited no particular interest or curiosity. The plan however, got its start when in order to find what their interests were, we began to share in their outside-school activities."[43] The traditional focus on teacher and text had kept the children from understanding real life experiences, subject matter being separate from real life experience. Education needed to

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[42] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Social Education in a Public School," **Childhood Education** 9 (October, 1932): 24.

[43] ERCP, Notebook-Manuscript on the Ballard School, (1929-1930) Series 4, 2.

focus on the interest and ability of the children, giving them a feeling of ownership in the process and be seen as the center of the community.[44]

Clapp saw herself implementing Dewey's *My Pedagogic Creed* through her work at Ballard. In *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey discussed "education being a social process, "the school is simply that form of community life in which those agencies are concentrated that will be the most effective in bringing the children to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social ends."[45] One could not enter into a community with preconceived notion of a community school. Being unique by nature, the essence of a community school had to be discovered by inquiry, questioning, and a study of culture, history, belief, values and the nature of labor.

Clapp received quite an awakening at Ballard due to what she called "her protected childhood on Brooklyn Heights."[46] Although considered by many in progressive education circles to be an expert in rural education, the situation in Kentucky proved an enormous challenge. She expressed her concerns in *Community Schools in Action* saying, "Unfortunately, or fortunately, we knew nothing of rural education. All this we had to learn."[47]

Clapp viewed Kentucky as the "mingling of the old and new, that today makes her rich educationally, for her children still can see the things around them the whole history of her growth

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[44] Ibid., 7.

[45] Ibid., 12. See also John Dewey, "My Pedagogic Creed," **The Early Works 1882-1898: Early Essays** Volume 5. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1975), 86-96.

[46] ERCP, Manuscript on the Ballard School, 6.

[47] Ibid., 4. Clapp's limited expertise is again evidence of the lack of understanding and experience in rural/public education.

and can, through it, understand the history and development of this country."[48] An understanding of the past was necessary for children to comprehend their role in the present. In essence, cultural understanding provided the foundation for self-realization, the first step in understanding the role of the individual in democratic community. The school as a social institution could and should enhance and nurture this understanding.

Clapp explained the role of the school and community in a 1933 article. "The fact that schools are schools of communities implies reciprocal and cooperative responsibility on the part of the community schools-cooperative endeavor for community affairs. It involves shared responsibility, the community for the school and the school for the community and this involves action of the school in community life because of its interests and investment of interest and activity as well as of money by the community in the school."[49] Clapp wrote in *Community Schools in Action* (1939) that it was in Kentucky "that we came to an understanding of the nature and functioning of a community school...answering the needs of the children and families of the school district, that brought us the realization that a public school in a rural area is necessarily a socially functioning school."[50]

Clapp believed the Ballard location, near the Ohio river and the city of Louisville afforded a unique opportunity for learning. The school used as its subject matter what they found in the surrounding environment. For example, due to the limited resources in science, teachers embarked on geological study along with the study of trees, birds, flora, natural resources and local sources

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[48] Ibid., 18.

[49] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "The Teacher in Social Education," 283.

[50] Elsie Ripley Clapp, **Community Schools in Action,** 3.

of power and energy.[51] Clapp's belief in the social role of the school in the community was clearly evident at Ballard. She sought to demonstrate to educators a "socially functioning school using the agencies at hand and where necessary creating these, also demonstrating the organization of subject matters for use in social education."[52] This involved close association with agricultural agents and medical and dental specialists at the University of Louisville and in the community. Ballard also included a sliding scale lunch program, cooking and sewing for girls, home visits, proper planting and public health education issues. As an example of the social role of the school, during the summer of 1930, 140 of 218 children in the Ballard school received health examinations. "The results of these examinations which confirmed our worst fears, came as a surprise to everyone. Of the 140 children examined, 109 had posture defects, 73 suffered from acute malnutrition, and in this undernourished group, 30 were threatened with infantile tuberculosis...unless ways and means could be found to meet these conditions half the children of Ballard would neither learn nor develop."[53]

While taking care of the health needs of the children was crucial, so was building upon the cultural past and present of the students. Clapp, an accomplished artist, viewed art as a means to help children integrate present experience with cultural past therefore, art was emphasized as a significant aspect of a child's education.

"Art has been used with all ages in the school, both as a means of realizing what they have been experiencing. It is freely and continuously used and is greatly enjoyed and appreciated.

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[51] Elsie Riley Clapp, "Social Education in a Public Rural School," 24.

[52] Ibid., 26.

[53] ERCP, Manuscript on the Ballard School, 2. See also **Community Schools in Action**, 12 for further documentation of this activity.

It has been a means of discovery, to the child's beauty in their surrounding and has constituted a personally satisfying way of uniting the child and his learning."[54]

Clapp writes of a Christmas play directed by teacher George Beecher which combined school and community participation: a social effort that stimulated growth of knowledge, interests, and appreciation. Clapp described it as a rural gathering a sharing of talent and interest to benefit the school and community.[55] Clapp, much like Dewey in *Art as Experience*, seems to comprehend that art by its very nature embodies democratic traits such as freedom of expression, open communication, creativity and imagination. Art serves as a means to involve the whole community and the school.[56]

In linking experience with interest and cultural understanding, Clapp supported studies that linked the past and present. During the Ballard years, 1929-1934, she discussed an eight grade play which emphasized the history of Kentucky during the Andrew Jackson era. The children decided that a play might be the best means to investigate this part of Kentucky history. Due to the economic and importance and geographical location of the Ohio River this led to a study of transportation including river boats, railroads and wagons. The children made costumes and furniture with community assistance. Clapp recalled, "the success of the plays, the intense interest, the engagement, the growth, were due to the fact that they filled a need for all the children, satisfied desires, gave meaning to familiar things around them, as in their own past."[57]

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[54] Ibid., 25. Clapp studied with William Zorach and seems years ahead of Dewey on understanding "art as experience" and its communicative capacity.

[55] ERCP, Typed copy of Christmas experience of school and community by George Beecher. Series 3.

[56] See John Dewey, **Art as Experience** (New York: Perigee, 1934).

[57] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "Plays in a Country School," **Progressive Education** 8 (January, 1931): 38.

The play provided a means for the children to better understand their place as well as a means to involve the community in the life of the school.

The focus on cultural history served as the foundation for study for the other grades. The first grade studied farm life while the second grade studied village communities. The third grade concentrated on Native American peoples who had inhabited the Kentucky area prior to the arrival of the white man. The fourth grade studied pioneer life and the fifth grade transportation. The sixth grade focused on the coming of the French, English and Spanish.[58] Unfortunately, from Clapp's description of these activities it is obvious that the perspective taken is Eurocentric. In her writing Clapp referred to Native Americans as Indians which was typical of the time. However, unfortunately there is no discussion in Clapp's writing that teachers discussed the conflict between the white man and the Native American over land and cultural conflict. The traditional depiction of Native peoples as inferior or savage is present even among these progressive educators. At Ballard this was evident in Clapp's description of a 4th grade play written and acted out by the students. The students decided to write a story about the American folk hero Daniel Boone and family. In the play, Boone's daughter strays from camp and is captured by the "Indians". Only through the bravery, cunning and honor of the white man is she saved. The eighth grade study of the Jackson era also failed to discuss the "Trail of Tears" which forced native people to move from the southeast to Oklahoma in a treacherous, deadly and costly journey. For Clapp and colleagues this is a serious failure to understand the diverse dimensions of democratic community and that community can not exist in an environment of classicism, racism and inequality. These

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[58] Elsie Ripley Clapp, **Community Schools in Action**, 22.

activities failed to stimulate reflection, inquiry and questioning, essential traits of the democratic citizen. Including the Native American experience could have strengthened the understanding of democratic community and its diverse nature as well as exploitation and oppression within their own Appalachian experience.

The Ballard School did attempt to influence the lives of the people in the community. For example, due to a study of wells by the first grade class, it was discovered that some of the wells were contaminated by sewage. This discovery resulted in moving several wells to higher ground, improving public health. This is a good example of people working together to improve the conditions of the community and gaining a new response for the value of education as meaningful in the lives of the people. The school, "because of its position and the value of its work penetrates and affects the lives of the people. It may improve conditions in the village and in the homes, means of health, ways of living. It teaches whatever is taught about leisure...and improved ways of living."[59]

The Arthurdale Years 1934-1936

Concern about the loss of community intensified among progressives following the crash of the stock market in 1929. In north central West Virginia signs of coming economic collapse struck the coal fields by the mid 1920's. Particularly hard hit were areas called Scotts Run, Jere and Osage. Many coal mines shut down putting people out of work and without means to provide for their subsistence. Activity of the United Mine Workers and the National Miner's Union increased as they sought support in the region, with some activity bordering on worker

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[59] Elsie Ripley Clapp, "A Rural School in Kentucky," **Progressive Education** 10 (March, 1933): 127.

revolt. The Hoover administration provided some aid to feed children through the efforts of the American Friends Service Committee however, this aid was far from enough. Following the election of Franklin Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt traveled alone to Scotts Run, an areas racked by poverty, violence and disease.[60] Enticed by Lorena Hickok, an Associated Press reporter, Mrs. Roosevelt to came to observe the devastation and try to help the people. Upon returning to Washington she began to push for aid to the people which would come through the National Industrial Recovery Act passed in 1933. Under Section 208 of the Act, the President and the Secretary of the Inferior Harold Ickes were given $25,000,000 to begin a federal subsistence homestead program. Due to the devastation of the area and Mrs. Roosevelt's insistence on helping the people of north central West Virginia, the first federal subsistence project would begin in north central West Virginia, officially called the Reedsville Experimental Project, later called Arthurdale.

Subsistence homesteads were designed to be model communities where people, given 4 to 7 acres of land could provide for their food subsistence. Ideally, the communities were to be located near industry or other possible wage earning opportunities.[61] The subsistence homestead was to be a community where people could gain a sense of ownership and make ends meet; to ideally be in control of their destiny. The homesteaders selected for Arthurdale were a highly selective group. Those selected were tested on their knowledge of farming, carpentry, diary

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[60] Eleanor Roosevelt made the trip on August 18, 1933. By the time of her visit, Scott's Run had been nicknamed as "bloody run" due to violence in the area. The Roosevelt administration was aware of the conflict in the area.

[61] Lois Scarf, "First Lady/First Homestead," in **A New Deal for America**. Edited by Bryan Ward. (Arthurdale. Arthurdale Heritage Inc., 1994), 105. This is the best publication on Arthurdale and its place in the larger federal subsistence homestead program of the New Deal.

farming etc. and chosen on their ability to make the project a success. However, due to the politically charged atmosphere, prejudice and Jim Crow, African Americans were not allowed to settle in the community, despite Eleanor Roosevelt's insistence. Due to Jim Crow laws in West Virginia at the time this would have required separate schools.[62]

Foremost in the mind of Mrs. Roosevelt and federal planners was a special type of education, experimental in nature, just like the subsistence homestead. Eleanor Roosevelt described her thoughts about the project and attempted to respond to the criticism that the project was too expensive. "The Reedsville project from my pont of view was an entirely different thing. It was from the start a laboratory in every way...the place where new types of rural schools might be tried out as an object lesson to communities of a similar kind through the country."[63] With the advice of Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee, Eleanor Roosevelt offered Elsie Clapp the job of Principal of the Arthurdale Schools and Director of Community Affairs.

Clapp officially became an employee of the project on July 7, 1934.[64] Clapp accepted the position because, "John Dewey wished to have worked out for education use a plan of community education-a cooperative enterprise of a community in and through a school."[65] Clapp viewed the

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[62] See Dan Perlstein, "Community and Democracy in American Schools: Arthurdale and the Fate of Progressive Education," **Teachers College Record** (Summer 1996): 625-650. Critiques Arthurdale's failure to deal with race and other issues of diversity.

[63] Eleanor Roosevelt, An Address called "Subsistence Farm Steads-Reedsville Project," National Archives. Record Group 48. Department of the Interior. 1-277. Box 53. p. 3-4.

[64] USDI Application for Employment. Clapp described herself as 54 years old, 5'6" tall and weighing 147 pounds. She listed John Dewey, William Heard Kilpatrick and George Arps as references.

[65] Ibid., Dewey's papers are virtually silent on Arthurdale. The Center for Dewey Studies located a letter from Dewey following his visit to Arthurdale in April 1936. He describes the Arthurdale schools as one of the best public schools in the nation. John Dewey to J.A. Rice April 16, 1936, Black Mountain College Papers, Center for Dewey Studies, Southern Illinois

project at Arthurdale as the ideal opportunity to utilize the school as a tool to restore community life. The school could grow just as the community was being built around it and with it. She did show concerns that "no one including myself really knew the function of a school in a homestead community project. Our work in Kentucky has shown us that health and recreational services make a good community relation."[66] No doubt the Ballard experience helped Clapp and staff begin their work at Arthurdale, another opportunity where the school could serve as the center of community life. She learned from Ballard that education needed to be a cooperative endeavor, a skill so necessary for problem solving during the depression. Work needed to be shared by all; parents students, teachers and other members of the community.[67]

To get a sense of the people and their culture, Clapp visited the Scott's Run area prior to the 1934/35 school year. She described her visit in *The Use of Resources in Education.* Coal operators had cut off the electricity, but allowed the miners to remain in the houses for fear the empty houses would become firewood.[68] If anything, the plight of the people had worsened by the summer of 1934. She saw in the people frustration, alienation and hopelessness, but believed like the federal planners, that progressive education in the new homestead and community school could free them from their misery and alienation. Discouraged and displaced miners complained to Clapp on her visit. "You ain't never going to make nothing of us. We're like them old apple trees

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University, Carbondale.

[66] ERCP, Notes on the Arthurdale School, 1934-1935, Series 3.

[67] Most of Clapp's staff at Ballard joined her at Arthurdale. For a list of these teachers see **Community Schools in Action**, 395-398.

[68] Elsie Ripley Clapp, **The Use of Resources in Education**, 4.

out there, all gnarled and twisted."[69] Clapp believed the coal camp existence had "bred habits of complaint, suspicion, obedience to the boss and resource to the relief of excess and also casual and irresponsible living."[70] She sensed the difficulty in overcoming this alienation and believed the subsistence community and progressive schools could give the people a greater sense of place, self realization and ownership.

With the advice of the Arthurdale School-National Advisory Committee, Clapp earnestly began work. Members of this committee included Eleanor Roosevelt, John Dewey, E.E. Agger of the Resettlement Administration, Fred Kelly of the Office of Education, Lucy Sprague Mitchell of Bank Street College, Clarence Pickett of the American Friends Service Committee and W. Carson Ryan, a well known figure in progressive education.[71]

Clapp worked closely with the Arthurdale Advisory School committee and project architects Eric Gugler and Steward Wagner in designing the school aesthetically and geographically to be a central facet in the lives of the people.[72] However, when school opened in the new homestead in the fall of 1934 there were no school buildings, books or furniture. Although disappointed, Clapp and staff saw this as an opportunity to involve the community in the life of the school. Young children made use of the Arthur mansion while the high school students held classes in the community center and two sheds. Clapp believed these problems brought the people together, outside of self-interests, benefitting the school children and the

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[69] Elsie Clapp, **Community Schools in Action**, 116.

[70] Ibid., 122.

[71] Ibid., 397.

[72] Alice Davis, with faculty from the Department of Education at West Virginia University, government officials, Eleanor Roosevelt and homesteaders had input on the type of school desired. See Clapp, **The Use of Resources in Education**, 8.

community at large. For example, fathers of the children built classroom tables, benches and blackboards for the school. For Clapp, this type of activity helped the people see the school as a community school, that it was theirs and that they should have a voice in it. This clearly involved putting aside self-interest for the benefit of the community.[73]

"A community school is not provided-it grows by concurrence and consent. It is a function, never a system. It is a joint production, the result of living and learning, shaped and guided by many events, as well as by ideas and purposed and by the feelings and responses of a large number of people, above all by the desires and the needs of the people whose school it is."[74]

Clapp considered the nursery school as the best example of integrating the school and the community. The nursery school catered to preschool children and served a social function through a well baby clinic, health work and parental education. Mothers were taught about sanitation and how to prepare nutritious meals. Designed by architect Steward Wagner, with input from Clapp and Elizabeth Stanton, the nursery school portrayed high ceilings and large windows for ventilation. Each grade had its own playground and sleeping porches designed to allow the children to play outside in inclement weather. Teachers in the nursery school made home visits to find out about the children and their environment.

Similar to Ballard, Clapp believed that the involvement of teachers in the community brought a sense of responsibility and solidarity to the teaching corps. Teachers were to share in the activities of the community, to experience life like the homesteaders. Neighborliness was viewed as an educational asset.[75]

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[73] Elsie Clapp, **Community Schools in Action**, 67.

[74] Ibid., 124.

[75] Dewey reiterates the role of the teachers in this type of community in his foreword to Clapp's **Community Schools in Action**, x. Due to housing shortages in Arthurdale the teachers tended to live outside the community.

Clapp and colleagues sought to develop a curriculum adjusted to the special needs of the community; a curriculum not hampered by traditional schooling through the grading and grouping of students. "This means that the real learning experience of the school will come chiefly through the vocational life of the community."[76] Examples of this approach to curriculum abound in Clapp's *Community Schools in Action* and *The Use of Resources in Education.* Yet their innovations in curriculum did create concern among the homesteaders at Arthurdale. The high school at Arthurdale did not receive state accreditation until 1938, two years after Clapp's departure. Some homesteaders believed that their children were not receiving as strong an education as other children in Preston County, particularly those in the Reedsville-Masontown areas. They viewed education as they had experienced it-through domination of the teacher and the text. Unfortunately, Clapp and staff did not communicate well with the parents about why they did what they did. This lack of understanding and the failure to communicate by Clapp and staff proved a detriment to building a true community school.

The philosophy of the Arthurdale school stated a faith in democracy and the belief that people are capable of governing themselves. Democratic procedures and process were to govern the formation and the administration of the school. They defined learning beyond the accumulation of information, but "implying rights and aptitudes and appreciations for all kinds of useful labor and a sincere regard for moral and social values."[77] Unfortunately, those ideas guiding pedagogy at Arthurdale proved more difficult to put into practice. Due to the politically charged nature of Arthurdale, Clapp and government officials were constantly concerned about the

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[76] Elsie Clapp, **Community Schools in Action**, 74.

[77] Ibid., 72-75.

homesteaders ability to make judgements and at time overruled the wishes of the homesteaders.[78]

Regardless of these problems, Clapp and staff did seek to link culture and subject matter to help the children and adults better understand who they were and their place in the community, ideally overcoming alienation. For Clapp, the curriculum could eliminate much of this confusion and frustration through a study of culture. "In rural communities it is the school that introduces what is called culture. It brings the children into contact with facts and ideas which it would never know without its aid-literature, history, science and world events."[79] Through study of the past, Clapp believed the homesteaders and children could gain a sense of security, "a sense of belonging here, a feeling that the land was theirs."[80]

For Clapp, culture embodied identity, an identity necessary for democratic community to exist and it could be found in the folkways, arts and historical traditions of the past. One of the outstanding examples of this took place under the direction of Fletcher Collins, the Director of Drama and Music at Arthurdale.[81] Collins described the traditional culture of the homesteaders. "While still basic to them, and very much in their blood, it [culture] came to Arthurdale layered over by coal dust; their experience in the mine camps brief though it had been, had obscured to them their cultural heritage; and being in the shadow of Morgantown, they had also been

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[78] See Holly Cowan, **Arthurdale**. (Masters Thesis. Columbia University, 1968), 40. Bruce Beezer, "Arthurdale: An Experiment in Community Education," **West Virginia History** 36 (October 1974): 33.

[79] Ibid., 217.

[80] Ibid., 126.

[81] Collins Interview, also see his discussion of activities in **Community Schools in Action**, 218-272.

disturbed by the radio, movies and by bourgeois cultural standards."[82] Collins is voicing a concern familiar to contemporary educators in how the capitalist media influences beliefs, values and perhaps even a consumerist and individualist mentality. For an educator whose focus is democratic community these influences are an obvious concern. As the director of drama and music, Collins attempted to use Appalachian culture, largely Scotch-Irish as he and others saw it, to enhance self-realization, the first step to community. These activities included square dancing, fiddle playing, guitar playing, ballad singing, quilt making, writing plays, nursery songs, dancing jigs and mouth harping.

According to Collins, the square dance provided a forum to meet together, to communicate, an opportunity for the homesteaders, to express themselves through song and dance. He viewed it as a type of activity that was communal, embodying shared interest and expression, in essence a democratic type of activity. "At Arthurdale, square dancing had also the added social values of bringing the homesteaders into easy, natural contact with the people of the region through the sharing of a cultural expression which was inherent in both groups."[83]

However, this wonderful social and educational experiment in community planning lasted only two years. From the onset, the Arthurdale schools were funded by federal, state, and private sources and by the spring of 1936 the failure to attract industry to employ the homesteaders led to the demise of private funding. Although the homesteaders were able to produce enough food for their families and often much more, they still needed wage labor to purchase goods and services. Consistent employment did not occur until the economy was stimulated by the Second World

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[82] Fletcher Collins in Clapp's **Community Schools**, 219.

[83] Ibid., 221.

War, when many of the men went into service or back into the mines. Much of the private funds for the school and staff came from Eleanor Roosevelt and Bernard Baruch. Clapp and staff were largely paid through private funds and so the progressive education experiment abruptly came to a close. When the schools opened in the fall of 1936 they were under the jurisdiction of the local Preston County Schools with curriculum becoming more traditional teacher and text centered.

Clapp left Arthurdale with deep sorrow and regret, yet may have experienced some personal relief because the project continually attracted media attention and political rhetoric from the Republicans who dubbed it Eleanor's baby. The social project of Arthurdale would continue through the war and end in 1947 when the federal government divested and sold the homes.

Conclusion and Challenge

During the last year of her work as editor for the journal *Progressive Education*, Clapp's book *Community Schools in Action* was published, documenting her extensive experience from 1929 to 1936 in the Ballard and Arthurdale Schools. Clapp made special note of one review of the book from Samuel Everett of Northwestern University. Although Everett saw practical benefits for the book he did not believe the programs were "sufficiently intellectualized. Issues such as those of race, farm tenancy, unionization, conservation of human and natural resources, unemployment, paternalism, dictatorship, nationalism, the maldistribution of wealth and income-in a word, the sickness of an acquisitive society-are noticeable for their almost entire absence." Everett challenged Clapp, for not bringing to bear an analysis and more critical attitude, based upon her extensive experience. Interesting and somewhat ironically, Dewey came to Clapp's rescue and responded to Everett. Dewey stated "that the educational policy of the school as she [Clapp] conducted it is a beautiful concrete exemplification of what I stated in very general terms-

the necessity of beginning with the local face to face community and developing its potentialities and resources, human and otherwise, if any serious attack is to be made upon the problems of the larger society."[84] Apparently Dewey believed Clapp had done a good job in linking the school and the community and to a point she had. Even Everett saw the practical pedagogical benefits in terms of curriculum innovation and development, but Clapp failed to push community into society at large. Arthurdale failed to adequately deal with race and although it did attempt to remedy unemployment and poverty, political power and profit motive kept industry from moving into the area to provide wages for the people. The homesteaders succeeded at what they were asked to do, yet had little understanding and control over the social, political and economic forces dominating their lives. Clapp's successes are tempered by this failure. As contemporary educators, we must take to heart the necessity of linking school and community with self realization and democracy, yet also attempt to understand how this might be corrupted by the "maldistribution of income" and what Everett calls the "the sickness of an acquisitive society."[85] Through historical study and analysis of this type of social and pedagogical experiment we can insight into the hurdles that need to be overcome and adequately addressed in democratic society. There is a need for a serious dialogue on the purpose of education in American society. Clapp and colleagues had a sense of purpose and although they made mistakes, largely misunderstanding the power of the school in social reform, they were guided by a belief in democratic community; a community grounded in shared interest for a common good. Today, the common good is rarely seriously

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[84] John Dewey to Samuel Everett, April 29, 1940. ERCP Series 2. Everett's review of **Community Schools in Action** was published in **Curriculum Journal**, Volume 2, no. 3, (March, 1940). A copy is in the Clapp papers.

[85] Ibid.

addressed with competition and an individualist mentality guiding many pedagogical reform efforts. An enormous challenge is before us as historians and as educators preparing students entering the teaching profession. Perhaps Dewey put it best in that creative democracy is still the task before us.